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Conservation Before Drilling
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President Bush spoke the truth in his State of the Union address earlier this year when he said Americans were addicted to oil. And the Republican-controlled House of Representatives proved his point last week when, on a vote of 232-187, members lifted the 25-year moratorium on off-shore drilling, allowing energy companies to extract oil and gas beneath waters from New England to Alaska.

Lifting the moratorium will only feed the addiction. The Senate should not follow the House's lead. All five members of Connecticut's House delegation were on the right, but losing, side in voting against the measure.

States could still stop the drilling under the bill, but would have to go through a cumbersome process to do so. Opponents of lifting the ban fear that energy development is an environmental disaster waiting to happen and that it threatens the recreation and tourism industries in states like Florida.

Those fighting to end the moratorium on drilling in environmentally delicate coastal areas hoist the banner of U.S. energy independence.

But, as governors - including Connecticut's M. Jodi Rell - said in letters to House leaders last week, off-shore drilling should be allowed only "as a last resort, not a first step..."

There are vast reserves of oil and gas available in off-shore waters already open to energy companies. Just as important, tougher conservation measures could lessen U.S. dependence on foreign oil - and help to curb global warming to boot.

But the House majority didn't want to consider conservation. An amendment to raise fuel-efficiency standards for vehicles to 33 miles per gallon over 10 years time was ruled out of order by the Rules Committee.

What a pity. The proposal, sponsored by New York Republican Sherwood Boehlert, could save more oil than is currently imported from the Persian Gulf and save the average driver more than \$500 a year, according to the Sierra Club.

Conservation and innovation are the ways to cure America's petroleum addiction.